

AN ASPECT OF THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN 17th CENTURY SCOTLAND

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IT is a commonplace that where the Reformation went, liberty went also. Holland, Scotland, England, Switzerland—all the countries which drank of the new springs—became pioneers of freedom, while lands like Spain and the Italian states, where the Reformation was followed by the Counter-Reformation, continued more or less as they had been before, and the annals of the liberated human spirit have few contributions of theirs recorded.

Nor was it only religious freedom that the Reformation spread abroad. Even when an historian like Bury denies that the leading Reformers had any intention of tolerating doctrines different from their own, he admits that the Reformation brought about a new set of political and social conditions under which liberty could be secured.¹ And it is these political and social conditions which are important. For whether they were the cause or the effect of religious freedom, they became the foundations upon which the modern world is built. (And it is significant that if in our own day the civilisation of the west is dissolving, as so many hold it is, the dissolution of freedom is being accompanied by, or perhaps rather was preceded by, a dissolution of religion. The two were born together, and the death of the one means the death of both.)

All this is well known, of course. And it is equally well known that the Reformation did not bring political and social freedom overnight. A long battle had to be joined, and some parts of it are not over yet—even now when it seems that the whole battle is at the point of beginning again almost from the very start. For there is a certain truth in the view that all the Reformation effected was to put the absolute State in the place of the absolute Church; that it was not that men were granted freedom, but that they merely changed their masters; the shackles were still on their wrists, and it was only a different gaoler who fastened them.

¹ *History of Freedom of Thought*, p. 77.

Such an interpretation of the facts is, no doubt, one-sided, and yet there is a certain truth in it. For over a wide area one of the most immediate consequences of the Reformation was the joining of the issue as between Church and State. That is nowhere more true than in our own land, where right from Knox's first interview with Queen Mary down to the Revolution Settlement one of the main issues was the nature and extent of the powers of the Crown. Of Knox's utterances before the Queen, Cunningham says, "they contain the germs of our political liberty resting on a limited monarchy,"¹ and the history of the century and a quarter after him is the record of how the germ was brought to fruit. The Reformers and Covenanters were struggling for a much bigger thing than the proper form of government for the *Church*. It was for the proper form of government of the *State*. Bishops were opposed not just because they were bishops, because, that is, the Covenanters' idea of a Church held no place for a hierarchy, but they were opposed much more because they represented a conception of the state, and a conception which the Reformation had declared to the Covenanters and their successors to be no longer allowable or tolerable.

What moved the Covenanters in the struggle? What was it that made the General Assembly set itself against all the traditions and powers of the English Court? The answer is, of course, the Bible. But it is interesting to examine a little more closely. Was it any particular part of the Bible? Because different branches of the Reformation went to different parts of the Bible for their authority and inspiration. As von Dobschutz points out,² Luther, owing to his familiarity with St. Paul, understood that Christianity had nothing to do with the Law; the whole notion of the Law had to be dropped out from the field of religion. . . . With Calvin it was different. He was interested in realising the Kingdom of God in the Christian congregation, or, to put it more accurately, in the commonwealth of Geneva, which was to him identical with the Christian congregation of that place. So it is the Old Testament Law as well as the Gospel which is to be regarded as the indispensable rule both of public and private life. With the Calvinists the Ten Commandments became an integral part of the regular Sunday service.

Was there any particular part of the Bible to which the Scottish Reformers and Covenanters appealed?

The answer which is broadly given, as we would expect from the Calvinist derivation of the Scottish Reformation, is that it was to the Old Testament which they appealed. Lecky, for example, says, "It is at

¹ *Church History of Scotland*, i, p. 301.

² *The Influence of the Bible on Civilisation*, p. 142.

least an historical fact that in the great majority of instances early Protestant defenders of civil liberty derived their political principles chiefly from the Old Testament and the defenders of despotism from the New. The rebellions which were so frequent in Jewish history formed the favourable topics of the one—the unreserved submission inculcated by St. Paul of the other.”¹ And Sir George Adam Smith, in his *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* puts the same thing from a different angle when he says that “the rise and elaboration of the Federal idea of Revelation led in Great Britain to a detailed extension of the political uses of the Old Testament in preaching which lasted into the 19th century. In Scotland especially this was inspired, not only by the institutions of the Law, but by the patriotism, national romance and passion of the historical and prophetic books. To-day the proudest memories of the Scottish people are associated with the struggles and heroisms of Old Testament history. It was not merely that for two centuries the prevailing theology of Scotland conceived of God’s relation to man under the form of a Covenant; but as in Israel’s case, the covenant was understood as national and it comprised every public interest.”²

Let us examine these general statements in a little more detail, and fill them out from the literature of the Scottish Reformation. And what I purpose in this paper is really no more than illustration. I intend quite simply to take one or two of the representative writings and writers of the period and, largely by actual quotation from them, show some of the ways in which they did use the Old Testament—what parts of it it was to which they turned chiefly, the ways by which they sought to establish conclusions from it, the standards of interpretation which they brought to it—in short, their general attitude to it and their use of it.

First, let us take the broad statements already quoted, that, generally, the appeal of the Covenanters was to the Old Testament, while that of the Royalists was to the New.

Perhaps as fair a way as any of making the test of them is to analyse one of the important writings of the time and examine the balance between Old Testament and New Testament citations in it. I take *Lex Rex* of Samuel Rutherford. By the method of counting the Biblical references on every 10th page of it—p. 7, 17, 27 and so on—I find that of the 124 quotations from the Bible which emerge, 99 are from the Old Testament, and only 25 from the New. There are, it is true, one or two pages in the 23 counted in which there are no Scripture references at all, as for example,

¹ *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, ii, p. 172.

² p. 245.

quite naturally, in sections such as that in which Rutherford is discussing the laws of Scotland. But in the pages where there are references, there is only one, so far as I observe, where the quotations are from the New Testament only: In every other the proportion is roughly what is indicated above. For every once that *Lex Rex* appeals to the New Testament for support it appeals four times to the Old.

The question which arises next is, to what parts particularly of the Old Testament did the Covenanters appeal? Were there books to which they went almost universally, and were there others which seemed to have little advantage for them? The answer is, that the bulk of the Presbyterian citations are from the *historical* books. If you can bear with statistics again for a moment, out of the pages which we have just used in *Lex Rex*, there are roughly five times as many quotations from the historical books (the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles) as from the Writings, and about eight times as many from them as from the prophets. That is, out of every 100 citations from the Old Testament, there are about 75 from the Histories, 15 from the Writings, and 10 from the Prophets. It must be remembered, of course, that in writings which had a different intention from *Lex Rex* the proportions might be slightly different, and there be a greater use of the prophets and the writings. In sermons, for example, the aim of which was consolation and comfort under the trials of the times, there would be more references to the Psalms, and where denunciation rather than demonstration was the end, the weight of quotations is from the Prophecies. But with political writings, books and tractates, it is the Samuel-Saul-David complex of stories, the Ahab-Elijah complex, and the Athaliah-Joash, to which recourse is most frequent. It is true that the exegesis of the time allowed almost any text to be used, quite without regard to its context, which might lend support to the argument. But it is also true that what the controversialists found in the main most useful for their purpose, which was their opposition to absolute monarchy, was the annals of the royal houses of Israel and Judah. Even when it is the prophets who are quoted, the appeal is very often not to what we should call their teaching, but to historical events which are mentioned, such as references to the Exile or illustrations from the career of Nebuchadnezzar.

Perhaps at this point it may be worth stopping to look at an actual example of how the historical books were employed by the Covenanters to establish what they wanted. We may take George Gillespie's *Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies obtruded on the Church of Scotland*, published in 1637 and written when the author was twenty-five years of age though it appears from the preface that it was actually composed when

Gillespie had "scarcely passed his twenty-second year." In the section in which he endeavoured to maintain that the ceremonies (that is, those which were expected to be introduced in 1638) were "unlawful, because they are monuments of by-past idolatry, which not being necessary to be retained should be utterly abolished, because of their idolatrous abuses," he seeks to establish his point by the following argument (amongst others), which is here summarised. "I fortify my proposition by approved examples, and, first, we find that Jacob, Gen. 34, 4, did not only abolish out of his house the idols, but their earrings also, because they were *superstitionis insigna*, as Calvin; *res ad idolatriam pertinentes*, as Junius; *monilia idolis consecrata*, as Pareus calleth them. . . . We have also the example of Elijah, 1 Kings, 18, 30; he would by no means offer upon Baal's altar, but would needs repair to the Lord's altar, though this would hold the people longer in expectation. . . . Further, we have the example of Jehu, who is commended for the destroying of Baal out of Israel, with his image, his house and his very vestments, 2 Kings 10, 22-28. And what example more pertinent than that of Hezekiah, who not only abolished such monuments of idolatry as at their first institution were but men's invention, but brake down also the brazen serpent (though originally set up by God's own command), when he saw it abused to idolatry? 2 Kings 18, 4." And before he finishes this particular argument, Gillespie adduces not only the work of Josiah and penitent Manasseh, but also Moses, "who was not content to execute vengeance upon the idolatrous Israelites, except that he should also utterly destroy the monument of their idolatry," and "Daniel, who would not defile himself with a portion of the king's meat, because it was converted *in usum idolatricum*."

The example just given illustrates the use which our forefathers made of the Old Testament to establish their point on an ecclesiastical question. But since it was not only their doctrine of the Church which they drew from there, but their doctrine of the State also, let us glance at one or two of the kinds of reasoning which they used in that connection also.

The first is from Rutherford. He is debating what power the people and states of Parliament have over the king, and in the state, and one of his arguments is this. "When David, Solomon, Asa, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat convened Parliaments, they convened Parliaments *ex debito et virtute officii*, out of debt and royal obligation, and if the king, as king, be *lex animata*, a living and breathing law, he must do by obligation of law what he doeth as king, and not from spontaneous and arbitrary grace. If Scripture holds forth to us a king of Israel, and two princes or elders who made the king and had power of life and death, then there is in Israel monarchy tempered with aristocracy; and if there were rulers and elders

in every city, as the Scripture saith, there was also aristocracy and democracy."

The other illustration I take is from John Brown of Wamphray's *Apologetical Relation of the Particular Sufferings of the Faithful Ministers and Professors of the Church of Scotland since 1660*. The general topic with which Brown is dealing is the lawfulness of Scotland's defensive war, and the particular point "whether the power of war resideth only in the king, and he only beareth the sword." One of Brown's arguments is this: "Inferior judges are commanded to rule well and rebuked for mal-administration." He then cites twelve relevant Old Testament passages in support and goes on: "Now would God command these inferior magistrates to relieve the oppressed, to judge the fatherless, the plead for the widow, if they had not the power of the sword for this effect; or would He challenge them for neglecting this duty, if they had not the power of the sword for this effect? Doubtless not. So then, if inferior magistrates be endued with power of the sword, they ought to rescue them from the hands of the oppressors. And therefore, when papist malignant enemies rise up in arms, and seek to destroy the land, men, wife and child, the inferior magistrates, much more than the Parliaments, may lawfully draw the sword which God hath given them for the relief of the innocent, and defence of the country . . . and all that is dear to them, against malicious and open enemies."

It would seem, then, that the general contention of Lecky and George Adam Smith, to keep to the men whom we have already quoted, is established. It would be tedious to go through a representative writing from the other, the Episcopal side, as well, with the same method, to say nothing of examining more Presbyterian writings, but if we did so, we would find the result the same. To ground their political theory, the Covenanters had recourse, mainly, to the Old Testament, while the appeal of their opponents is generally to the New.

The broad statement is then, on the whole, true. But it demands certain limiting qualifications.

(1) First of all, we must guard against supposing, as the general thesis might lead us to suppose, that the appeal—and this is true of both sides of the controversy—was to Scripture and Scripture alone. It was, of course, to that chiefly, and the primacy of the Bible in the ordering of both Church and State is assented very frequently by each of the parties. "That the worship of God" Calderwood says in *The Psalter and the Prelate*, "and the government of the Kirk, which is the house of God, are to be learned out of His own word, is a truth against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. . . . As (God) is a perfect high priest for recon-

ciliation, He is also a perfect prophet for revelation, and a perfect king and lawgiver for ruling of His kirk and kingdom. We ought to give this glory to the spirit of God that, as He purposed to set down a covenant, a testament and a perfect canon, so in fulness of wisdom He hath performed that purpose. We ought humbly to acknowledge, that the kirk hath no power to make new laws, or to institute any new office or office-bearer, any minister, or part of ministration, in the house of God." The primacy of the Word which Calderwood asserts thus is asserted generally throughout the period, and that the Bible is the norm for the ordering of not only the government of the Church, but the State also, is the foundation, usually, upon which all arguments are reared.

But occasionally we seem to move in a rather different atmosphere. It is natural, the controversy of the times being what it was and the form and government of the Church being so intimately linked up with the question as to the extent of the powers of the king, it was natural that on both sides there should be a considerable bulk of appeal not only to Holy Writ, but to law. How far this may be an appeal to Scripture at second-hand, as we might say, in that the jurists who are quoted were themselves based in Scripture and had constructed their systems round it, I am not competent to say: it is possibly true of the Dutch jurists, though, of course, certainly not of the pagans. Nevertheless it is with something of a start that one comes, after much reading in men like Rutherford and Gillespie, where the attempt is made to derive, justify or condemn almost everything on the basis of Scripture almost exclusively—it is, after that, with something of a surprise that one comes upon a sentence like this of George Buchanan's where he says that "indeed, if it should be made a rule that nothing ought to be done without a precedent, only a small remnant of our civil constitutions, and even of our laws, will continue standing; for the greatest part of them is founded, not upon ancient precedents, but established in opposition to new and unprecedented encroachments." (*Rights of the Crown in Scotland*, p. 273.) Buchanan is in the passage answering the man—the parasite, he calls him—who demands from Holy Writ an example of a king punished by his subjects. It does not seem necessary to him to cite one, though he elsewhere tackles objections on their own ground, but he immediately leads the controversy out into the larger field. "It does not directly follow," he says "that what we do *not* read in Scripture should be held wicked and nefarious. I can enumerate, from the codes of many nations, numerous and most wholesome laws, of which there is not the least trace in the sacred Scriptures." The sentiment or perhaps rather the direction of gaze, is perhaps the natural one for a jurist like Buchanan and no more than we should have expected, but is it not isolated. No other expresses it so forthrightly. And Buchanan ex-

presses it forthrightly more than once, In another passage of *de Jure Regni apud Scotos* he says, "Therefore I advise you either to provide from Scripture some stronger bulwark for your tyrants, or to set it aside for the present," (p. 270)—no one else expresses such an attitude to Scripture so bluntly, but we come up against the suggestion of it over and over again. Scripture is, however much the parties arguing thought it was, not the *only* sphere of reference. As we shall see later, the court was Scripture *plus*.

Before going on, Buchanan may lead us to notice in just a sentence, another field of literature not infrequently gleaned by the controversialists of our period, namely, the Classics. Here again—and perhaps naturally—Buchanan is perhaps the leader: he mentions Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Homer, Cicero and at least half a dozen others before he comes to Saul and David and St. Paul—but the other writers gather from the same field also. Indeed, the erudition of the controversialists is enormous, even granting that they may often have gone to *Loci* or collections of quotations and not to the originals: it is one of the most remarkable things in their writings. As Dr. W. M. Campbell, in a paper on Rutherford delivered before this Society a few years ago said, "Aristotle and Ulpian, Aquinas and Aegidius Romanus, Gerson, Marsiglis and Cusanus, Hotman, Althusius and Grotius, Suarez, Vasquez and Bellarmine, Bodin, Barclay and Ferne, James VI and Maxwell—Greek philosopher, Roman jurist, mediaeval scholar, conciliar Advocate, Spanish Jesuit, Dutch jurist, English pamphleteer, French Royalist—all are made to contribute to the argument, or refuted in their doctrine."

(2) A second limitation of the general statement is demanded by the matter of what Gillespie calls "the English Popish Ceremonies obtruded on the Church of Scotland," for it is clear that here it was the Episcopalians, and not the Presbyterians, who could take their stand upon the Old Testament. The Jewish Law with its Prescriptions, and the Temple with its ceremonies, stood ready to hand for the former, who, following the exegesis of the times, were able to help themselves by deriving the Festivals from the 4th Commandment, and justifying kneeling at the receiving of the Sacrament from the 95th Psalm: *O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*. The rites and ceremonies were obviously a difficult case for the Covenanters to answer on their usual ground, and sometimes they departed from strict Scriptural argument altogether. Or else they found themselves forced to a close exegesis of the New Testament as much as of the Old, for they were obliged to answer their opponents' objection that the Jewish ceremonies continued for a time in the early Church. And it is in meeting this ob-

jection that, as it seems to me at any rate, some of their finest reasoning and exegesis occurs. To read the second part of the *Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*, which is against the expediency of the Ceremonies, is to be reminded that, if our forefathers found in general more to suit their purpose in the Old Testament, they were equally comprehensive in their knowledge of the New, and could appeal to it also with telling effect.

(3) One further thing should be said. It is clear from what has just been said that on many occasions Presbyterians and Royalists made their appeal to the same Scriptures, and drew opposite conclusions from the same passages. For example, in the controversy about the Episcopal ceremonies, both sides had recourse to Leviticus 18, 3, where the Israelites are forbidden to practise the usages of the Egyptians and the Canaanites : but each drew from it a different conclusion. To the Presbyterians it was a command to abstain from *all* the rites and customs of idolaters, while Hooker saw in it only a barring of Israel "from similitude with those nations in such things as were repugnant to God's laws and ordinances." Both sides were, of course, aware of the difficulty, and both were ready to accuse the other of a misrepresentation of their own position. "There is," we read in the *Apologetical Declaration* (p. 120,) "a ready way to cast all Scripture as unable to determine any controversy ; for, if adversaries may be believed, all those passages which are made use of against them do carry another sense, and must be otherwise interpreted : and so all Scripture must go under the name of equivocal sentences, and must be laid aside."

The result is, of course, that in practice, the appeal is to more than Scripture. History and Law, as we have already seen with Buchanan, the Fathers and the Schoolmen, the Jewish scholars and, perhaps above all, the leaders of the Reformation, are all laid under obligation and made to contribute their authority.

And yet, even with these three limitations upon the general proposition that the Royalists look to the Old Testament for their justification and their opponents to the New, the proposition itself remains, and it has additional strength given to it when we remember the insistence which was laid upon a subject which needs only to be mentioned, since it is so well known, the Covenant. "If," says Rutherford, "the people make a king, as a king, conditionally, for their safety . . . and if God maketh him a king conditionally, and so by covenant : and therefore when God promiseth in 2 Sam. 7, 12, 1 Chr. 28, 7-8, to David's seed and to Solomon a throne, he promiseth not a throne to them immediately, as he raised up prophets and apostles without any immediate action and consent of the

people : which condition and covenant he expresses in the very words of the people's covenant with the king : So they walk in the way of the Lord, and take heed to God's commandments and statutes to do them." That, as it seems to me, is what is central. That is the Covenanters' canon, not only for their political and ecclesiastical theories ; but also for their interpretation of Scripture. Implicitly or explicitly in all their exegesis it is that which they come back to. Each party in the controversy brought spectacles to the Bible. The Covenanters' spectacles were the idea of the Covenant. For them it was what was fundamental in the Scriptures.

